

Testimony of Rayallen Bergman, B.S.

Good evening Co-Chair Gerrantana, Co-Chair Dillon, Co-Chair Somers, and sub-committee members. My name is Rayallen Bergman and I am the Program Coordinator for Southeastern Regional Action Council (SERAC). The region includes 20 towns in Southeastern, CT. My agency has been providing prevention programs and fostering town coalitions since the enactment of legislation in the 1980's, creating Regional Action Councils (RAC) across the state. I am here to express my opposition to Governor Malloy's proposed budget cuts to essential Regional Action Council funding and the crucial programs they support.

If these proposed budget cuts are approved, we may be forced to close our doors. This action will dismantle the infrastructures, built to leverage funding for local prevention efforts, for over 25 years. SERAC is the only evidence based prevention entity in our entire region. There is no other agency that duplicates the diverse work of SERAC. The science of prevention has proven that for every \$2 spent in prevention, society saves \$10 in intervention and treatment costs. The proposed budget cuts will not alleviate the State's financial deficit, but it will shift the need from proactive programming into reactive crisis intervention.

I currently manage the Adolescent Learning and Leadership Institute (ALLI), which is a prevention based, youth development program, for High School students in our region. We have approximately 60 members representing these towns: Norwich, Montville, Ledyard, Stonington, North Stonington and Waterford. In our last meeting we discussed the potential impact of these budget cuts, which will affect numerous youth prevention programs in Southeastern, CT. Our ALLI students have voiced their concern of potentially losing these valuable youth initiatives in their community. I will share some of those opinions here:

Courtney from Waterford remarked, "Many horrible habits have been trending in both school systems and in our outside life. Whether as a child, teen or an adult, there is a deep value in the prevention of negative habits like substance abuse. However, I think the main value of (these programs) was the confidence to stand up for what (we) believe in. Our special guests, projects, media campaigns and others inspired all of us in different, yet meaningful ways. Ultimately, youth programs need their funding to continue to make a difference in the lives of millennials."

Taylor from Montville remarked, "The program has helped me to become more aware of the positive impacts I can have in my community. I have become aware of controversial topics like Marijuana use and the dangers of buzzed driving. This has never been a topic I've thought a lot about, but now I realize the true dangers."

Gracie from North Stonington noted, "The program has continued to teach us more about different controversial subjects. Through the program, each individual has a chance to have their voice heard, especially by our elected officials."

Avery from Ledyard remarked, "ALLI (and prevention programs) helps me learn important skills to be a good leader... it's important to have these skills and traits like communication, problem solving and prevention lessons so that we can thrive in life and after college."

John from Norwich noted, "To me, these programs mean a lot because not only is it leader (training), it's also teaching me how to be a better person in my community and a better person in general. (It also teaches me how I can take the skills that they teach me here and apply it to other situations. They also teach us about substance abuse that's happening in the community and how we can prevent it. (These programs) take kids from different schools that share the same beliefs and talk about problems in our communities and how we can collectively figure out a solution."

Ryan from Montville noted, "there are so many problems concerning youth today such as suicide, opioid overdoses, prescription drug misuse, and youth substance use around the state. Teenage years are the second

most important development stage for the brain, so making sure that teenagers have an opportunity to learn these issues is extremely valuable to improve our future. We need to start with the youth.”

There is no other agency that is doing the prevention work that the RACs do throughout Connecticut. Ultimately, these cuts could result in the closure of the Southeastern Regional Action Council office. This would be a significant loss to the 20 communities served by SERAC. I urge you to keep intact this important prevention funding and the preventative infrastructure that combats issues such as suicide, opioid overdoses, prescription drug misuse, youth substance use and community development.

Sincerely,

Rayallen Bergman